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Source: *Narrative*, May, 2003, Vol. 11, No. 2 (May, 2003), pp. 213-233

Published by: Ohio State University Press

Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/20107311

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Ingrid G. Daemmrich

Paradise and Storytelling: Interconnecting Gender, Motif, and Narrative Structure

In "Bluebeard's Daughters: Pretexts for Pre-Texts," Jane Marcus observes that storytelling and reading "remain unquestioned as the marks of [being human]" (21). Because being human occurs in two genders, storytelling and reading are, she asserts, gendered activities. Men's stories, she suggests, tend toward "blood narratives of adventure and quest," while women write "milk narratives" that trace the fluid connections of women's experiences from mothers to daughters (27; see also Cixous 20; Irigaray 112–13; and Lanser, "Sexing the Narrative" 87–88).

Narratives centered on the loss, search, discovery, and creation of paradise offer an unparalleled opportunity to study this postulated relationship between gendered storytelling and narrative structure. Interestingly, fiction and paradise share the same original meaning. Fiction can be traced to the Latin verb *fingere,* to form or mold (see Lausberg 220, para. 398; 482, para. 983). The word *paradise* derives from two Old Persian roots, *pairi* (around) and *diz* (to shape or mold). It first designated the Persian king's enclosed park or garden, a place of perfect happiness. Theology and mythology moved the site of ineffable bliss to the beginning or end of human history and gave it various names: Eden, the biblical earthly garden of delights; Heaven, or the Celestial City promised to believers after death; the classical Elysium, or the Isles of the Blest, the abode of the heroes of Greek mythology; Arcadia, the fictive pastoral landscape in the Peloponnesian mountains in Greece; and the Golden Age lost by human greed. Literature has integrated these diverse traditions into a single motif that is instantly recognizable through such common features as green trees and grass, gentle hills or steep mountains, colorful flowers, pure water, blue skies, balmy breezes, proximity to the divinity/divinities, joy, peace, harmony, and freedom from

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NARRATIVE, Vol. 11, No. 2 (May 2003)
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fear, work, strife, want, disease, and death.[1] Through its recurrence, variation, and intra- and intertextual linking capacity, the motif transforms a mythical, static vision of bliss into a vibrant narrative unit that actively engages the storyteller's intent. As a narrative unit, the motif embodies successively—or occasionally simultaneously—Bremond's notions of "agent" and "motivation" (174, 187), Brooks's concept of narration as an expression of desire (61), Deleuze and Guattari's paradigm of the rhizome (19–36), and Hanne's nodal point where "the threads of narrative join and divide" (39), and is a vehicle for Pavel's concept of "ontological fusions" (138), Prince's "kernel narrative" (83), and Todorov's "narrative filters" (177). This essay, however, specifically examines the transformation of the motif's narratological functions when stories about paradise shift from men's tales of adventure and quest to women's fiction centered on complex, fluid interconnections. A small number of texts have been selected from the vast literature of paradise from antiquity to the present to illustrate this shift. Readers are encouraged to add their own examples.

INTERCONNECTIONS BETWEEN THE PARADISE MOTIF AND MASCULINE NARRATIVES OF ADVENTURE AND QUEST

In order to trace this transformation, it is necessary to begin with the motif's traditional narratological roles. Its earliest appearances occur in tales of the quest for a remote, inaccessible paradise.[2] Despite varied intentions, settings, and genres, these narrations exhibit two common characteristics: they integrate a male-initiated adventure and quest with the longing for paradisal bliss, and they are all written by men for a predominantly male audience. For the "other gender," these two traits have profound consequences. First, with the exception of the imitative Christiana in Bunyan's sequence to *The Pilgrim's Progress from This World to the Next,* women questers are noticeably absent in these texts. Instead, the feminine is identified as the paradisal landscape itself. As object of the quest, paradise in these narratives frequently exhibits such traditional feminine attributes as beauty, grace, purity, peace, and love.[3] It also reacts like a woman to male sexual advances by either refusing penetration, acquiescing by gradually opening itself to the quester, or in imitation of the inscrutable reputation of the female sex, responding enigmatically. Second, reflecting a patriarchal order, its response to seekers and intruders is not decided by paradise itself but by its male guardians or interpreters. Like a desired woman, paradise becomes an object to be manipulated among contending males.[4] Narratives ranging from medieval tales of Alexander the Great's arrogant attempt to conquer Paradise to Carlos Fuentes's ironic retelling of Columbus's discovery of the paradisal Hispanola in "The Two Americas" are structured around the adventures of the male quester who searches, discovers, strives to possess and manipulate, or loses a paradise with strongly feminine attributes.

Because questers in many traditional religious works such as Dante's *The Divine Comedy* or John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* take the opposite tactic from Alexander the Great or Fuentes's Sailor and humble themselves as pilgrims, they win their prize and are embraced by paradise. Moreover, the figure guarding paradise

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against aggressive questers metamorphoses into numerous guides of both sexes who assist the pilgrims in overcoming the many obstacles along the way. Retained, however, are the feminized features of paradise, such as the Land of Beulah's "sweet and pleasant" air, singing birds, bright flowers, the nourishing orchards and vineyards in Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, or the feminized space that stresses connectedness, fluidity, simultaneity of position, and community in Dante's *Paradise*. The climax of both narratives portrays the quester shedding the masculine traits of adventure and conquest in order to become an instrument of divine will.[5]

In narratives depicting the quest for earthly, artificial, or imaginary paradises, the encounter between the male quester or creator and a feminized paradisal space generates three different narrative patterns. The first is centered on questers who, like Dante's narrator, exchange their masculine traits for the feminine features of connectedness and consensus, and are consequently promoted to protectors and spokesmen of their feminized paradises. This pattern is particularly pronounced in such Romantic fantastic literature as E. T. A. Hoffmann's *The Golden Pot*, Charles Nodier's *The Crumb Fairy*, or Gérard de Nerval's *Sylvie*, in which the protagonist discovers his paradise in the realm of poetry to which his lover leads him. The second pattern depicts questers who, by retaining their masculine aggressiveness as they penetrate paradise, ravish and destroy the fragile space. They are exemplified by exotic travel tales such as Loti's *The Marriage of Loti*, by Carlos Fuentes's ironic story "The Two Americas," or by science fiction like Auguste Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's *Tomorrow's Eve* and Clarke and Gentry Lee's *The Garden of Rama*. The third pattern focuses on questers who, by penetrating unpredictable paradises, are annihilated, just as lovers of unpredictable, unstable women can be. Narratives centered on the artificial paradises of hallucination model this pattern. Ingesting a few grains of laudanum or a carefully measured portion of heroin affords an effortless entry into a femininely kinetic, fluid, and formless state of bliss. The quester's masculine traits of aggression and competition dissolve into the pure enjoyment of an indescribable joy. But like a she-devil, the hallucinatory paradise suddenly, inexplicably reveals itself as an entrapment that emasculates the quester by first seducing him with visions of ineffable bliss, then plunging him into hellish terror, and finally robbing him of any motivation other than seeking the same cycle.[6] Unlike the conversion experiences portrayed by Dante, Bunyan, or Hoffmann, narratives of hallucinatory paradises exhibit a pattern of continuous oscillation between heavenly bliss and hellish terror that threatens to destroy rather than redeem the protagonist.

The paradise motif in masculine narratives of adventure and quest functions, then, paradoxically. The encounter between an aggressive male (con)quester and a paradise endowed with the feminine attributes of gentleness, grace, and beauty results in a radical change for one or both of the actants. On the one hand, in much of the canonical literature of paradise, pursuing the object of his desires requires the quester to renounce the very aggressiveness that has motivated and sustained his quest. Only then can he enter the realm of bliss. If, on the other hand, he seizes paradise as a conqueror, he destroys its femininely nonaggressive nature. But if the paradise he seeks is as unpredictable as an inscrutable mistress, its enigmatic shifts can destroy him.

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The pastoral tradition offers a major variant of these narrative patterns by relocating adventure and quest from outside to inside the boundaries of the feminized paradise. Here male aggressiveness asserts itself in intrigues and contests that, like the unpredictable paradises of hallucination, provide suspense and entertainment. From Theocritus's *Idylls* to T. Coraghessan Boyle's *Budding Prospects: A Pastoral*, the action of this deceptively simple genre has frequently centered on the characters' competition for a desired object, often a woman.[7] For the male contenders, the paradise motif acts as the intersector of the masculine subject's desire and the female object of desire. The feminine allure is doubled by its manifestation in both the pastoral setting of gentle hills, nurturing fruit trees, fields, groves, rivers, sheep, and sheltering villages and palaces, and the female characters who are the contended objects of love. Book Six of Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene,* for example, builds its suspense by oscillating between a narrative of adventure and quest and a tale of intrigue and competition.[8]

In contrast, narratives in which the pastoral setting plays a dominant rather than a secondary role shift women's roles from embodying a harmony between the feminine and the feminized paradise to participating in male aggressiveness. In fact, the many female titles of pastoral romances demonstrate that in the pastoral space, women characters are frequently given the role of protagonists initiating complex, open-ended plots of intrigue and competition.[9] Male characters respond not only with counterplots but also with subservience, dependence, and occasionally, passivity.

Reversing gender roles in the pastoral both reinforces and challenges the traditional narrative's intersection between the paradise motif and gender. Characteristic examples that sustain the basically aggressive configuration are the tales of sorceress-intriguers who create illusive or deceptive artificial paradises as settings to attract, entrap, and destroy their male victims.[10] While the tales of sorceresses who lure knights through artificial paradises reinforce the pastoral's intersection of the paradise motif with the aggressive female conquest of males, the parodic Marcela episode in Cervantes's *Don Quixote* and Boyle's modern parody *Budding Prospects: A Pastoral* challenge it. Cervantes's Marcela triumphs by beating her opponents at their own basically aggressive intrigues, thereby both subverting and reinforcing the interplay between the parodied paradise motif and gender.[11] But her conquest is temporary. Marcela's body, Adrienne Munich points out, becomes the subject of male-generated literature, first in the form of the odes composed by her suitors for the dead Chrysostom, second by the narrator of the episode, and third by Cervantes himself. Hence Cervantes's lampoon reinforces the relationship between the paradise motif and gendered writing. Even though male bliss has been thwarted by female ingenuity, the triple narration assures that it remains firmly rooted in the male sphere. Boyle's *Budding Prospects: A Pastoral* both reinforces and undermines the relationship between gendered writing and the paradise motif by being narrated by a male loser. Caught between his quest for bliss and the humiliation of losing to his competitor, Felix expresses his outrage through the narrative techniques of irony and parody. In reinforcing Felix's "feminine" passivity, they cause the story to mock the storyteller.

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INTERCONNECTIONS BETWEEN THE PARADISE MOTIF AND FEMININE MULTIDIRECTIONAL NARRATIVES

Female narratives confront the traditional narratological association of the paradise motif with adventure, quest, intrigue, and competition by centering on the problems faced by those whose oppression, restriction, or marginalization prevent engaging in the quest for bliss. Since these problems are multidirectional, this realignment disassembles the cohesiveness of the paradise motif into a fluid network of ambivalent and paradoxical alliances. Women's narratives can then shape these alliances into complex, nonlinear patterns. By incorporating a "playful pluralism" of perspectives and meanings (Kolodny), the motif changes the shape of narratives from a familiar scripted, linear progression to unfamiliar, open-ended, fluid structures that signal stories in progress.[12]

As early as the nineteenth century, Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* challenged the connection between the paradise motif and narratives of quest and conquest by linking references to Eden with her narrator's reflections on the uncertain stations in her development from marginalized passivity to assured self-assertion. Like her male counterparts, Brontë's protagonist undertakes a quest for bliss. But unlike her male counterparts, her search ends in ambiguities and enigmas. Orphaned as a child and dependent on the charity of others, Lucy Snowe is conscious of her exclusion from both the public affairs of men and the private domestic sphere of women with supportive families. As she struggles with poverty, isolation, and a lack of self-confidence, achieving paradisal bliss seems a distant fantasy. Comparing her struggle in a hostile society that locks her away in "small closets" with the serene existence of her well-positioned rival for Dr. John's affection, she muses: "Some lives *are* thus blessed; . . . it is the attesting trace and lingering evidence of Eden. . . . Other travellers encounter weather fitful and gusty, wild and variable-breast-adverse winds, are belated and overtaken by the early closing winter night" (486). In aligning the quest for paradise with social privilege rather than male heroic attributes, Lucy transfers the motif's linking capacity from the "blood" narrative's emphasis on adventure and quest to the "milk" narrative's focus on social connectedness. Because in contrast to her rival she lacks social connections, Lucy depicts herself as being denied a "serenely Edenic existence" and facing instead a life filled with storms. But the passage can also be read as a subversion of the "blood" narrative's assumption that courage and devotion conquer all obstacles to paradisal bliss. Instead, Lucy's account embraces both her failure and her rival's success.

Lucy's next linking of the paradise motif with social connectedness shows a dramatic growth toward self-assertiveness and narrative facility. Required to compose an essay on the theme "Human Justice" by the despotic M. Paul to prove that she is not an impostor, she re-creates her negative experience with social justice as an ironic caricature. She depicts Human Justice as "a red, random beldame," and her house filled with suppliants as "the den of confusion," while "she smoked and she sipped and she enjoyed her paradise" (495–96). By connecting an ironic satire of paradise as the retreat from the demands of a suffering humanity with an equally

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ironic caricature of the allegorized Human Justice, Lucy's essay masterfully undermines M. Paul's masculinist assumptions about the credibility of both.

A third connection of the paradise motif with the narrative occurs in Lucy's account of her hallucinatory dream of a fantastic night festival in Villette's park. A strong opiate taken to calm a headache after learning that M. Paul was leaving for Guadalupe stimulates her to escape the confines of her school-prison in order to join the colorful, imaginary festivities: "Where was I? In a land of enchantment, a garden most gorgeous, a plain sprinkled with coloured meteors, a forest with sparks of purple and ruby and golden fire gemming the foliage" (550). Brontë intersects Lucy's paradisal vision with narration in two ways. First, the motif recalls the hallucinatory visions in traditional male narratives recounting the quest for paradise. Second, it undermines the intertextual reference by contradicting the ending given by these narratives to the hallucinatory dream. For unlike the characters in such narratives of hallucination as Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* or Eugène Sue's *Atar-Gull,* Lucy experiences healing and profound insight instead of the pain or listlessness of withdrawal: "I felt glad now, that the drug administrated in the sweet draught had filled me with a possibility which made bed and chamber intolerable. I always, through my whole life, liked to penetrate to the real truth. I like seeking the goddess and handling the veil" (564). At home in the feminized fluid space of the hallucinatory paradise, Lucy voices the female narrative's potential to discover truth by joining the various strands of her experience into a fluid continuum. Like a tent that can be folded up or expanded at will (555), her tale can extend or diminish her attention to the enigmas surrounding her. Even more importantly, she discovers her acuteness in piecing together the complex parts of this puzzle and her delight in deliberately leaving some pieces unconnected in order to invite readers to continue its solution.[13]

In the latter half of the twentieth century, the interplay between female protagonists, the paradise motif, and narrative structure in women's fiction coalesces with the widespread development of achronological, multi-layered fiction. Irony and parody frequently furnish the threads that spin the multiple voices and directions into a complex, open-ended network of relationships.[14] For example, Solita, the eleven-year-old protagonist-narrator of Elena Castedo's *Paradise*, employs the paradise motif as an ironic leitmotif to mark the stations of her self-development and self-insight. As narrator, she undermines both the conventional definitions of paradise and their perverted redefinition by her mother, Pilar, and Pilar's lover, Tía Merce, often by juxtaposing them. The novel's first sentence captures Solita's initial puzzlement over her parents' conflicting definitions of paradise: "When my mother told me I was going to Paradise that afternoon, I had no idea what she meant. My father always said Paradise was a hoax invented by priests to seduce nitwits. In Paradise, my mother said, children were always happy, playing in unbounded spaces under clear blue skies, surrounded by fruits and flowers and the utmost good taste" (3). Solita's ensuing narration of her agonizing stay on the "paradisal" estate of El Topaz, to which her mother takes her, transforms her parents' definitions into a chiasmus. On the one hand, her mother's promise that El Topaz "will be Paradise for you" is exposed as a cruel hoax (24). Instead of freedom and joy, Solita fills her narrative with

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scenes of pain and oppression, as she describes her denigration into a plaything to be alternately abused and scorned by the privileged children of her mother's lover.[15] On the other hand, her father's criticism of the paradise preached by priests as a hoax is contradicted by Solita's response to Padre Romualdo's sermon. It portrays Eden as fulfilling precisely Solita's dream of a reconciliation between her estranged parents: "Adam and Eve and couples and families staying together; the most sensible things I had heard in Paradise" (176). The ironic juxtaposition between a spiritual Eden that promises reconciliation and a fraudulent earthly paradise that encourages corruption climaxes in Solita's reaction to her mother's announcement that she and her father are separating: "Paradise is where couples get joined . . . not the other way" (322).

To further the deconstruction of Pilar's deceptive paradise, Castedo intersects her narrator's childlike voice with other, more sophisticated voices that Solita as actant in her tale overhears. The ensuing layering of a child's and an adult's voice intensifies the irony. For example, Solita recounts Merce first boasting to her mother, "My girls will have enchanted childhoods; three princesses in *Paradis* . . . ," then turning seductively to Pilar with the words, "we can only create *Paradis* with you. You won't leave, will you? You won't ruin my paradise; you are my paradise" (35). Here the motif marks the ironic shift from innocence to perversion, as it moves from signifying children's play to expressing lesbian passion. The connection of sexual arousal with paradise is reinforced by other fortuitously overheard guests' voices, such as Melons's comment, "listening to the echoes of snakes, frogs, pumas and ranch animals mating out there. That's Paradise for you; Adam and Eve and all other creatures; it heats up your bed" (231), or the visiting psychologist's foreshadowing prediction: "And beware, Paradise dwellers; remember that after the apple comes mortality" (232). His words are fulfilled when Merce is murdered during Holy Week festivities, which ironically include the children cutting red paper apples. All are expelled from the estate.

Solita concludes her story with a final ironic observation regarding paradise: "And when I grew up, I was never going to Paradise" (327). Her statement marks both her and her narrative's maturation. Through her narration, Solita undermines the deceptive paradise of El Topaz as a demonic perversion from which to flee, thereby reversing the traditional quest for paradise. Having subverted her mother's simplistic equation of El Topaz as paradise and having come to understand through Padre Romualdo's retelling of the Eden story that true paradise is the nodal point connecting individuals into families, she endows her life story with an open end that she intends to control in the future.

Toni Morrison employs the paradise motif in her novel *Jazz* to capture the interplay between the persistent dream of a paradisal bliss and the subversion of that dream through the bitter after-effects of racism, poverty, and psychological dysfunction. Like a jazz band, the narrator, a nameless neighbor, weaves together multiple perspectives of paradise evoked by its various names. The diverse concepts repeat, contradict, support, and undermine each other, even as they connect with the central plot. Because the narrator and her sources are not entirely credible, the perspectives build a series of floating contexts, significations, and ironic plays with paradise.[16] For example, while listening to Neola's cautionary tales about love and disillusionment,

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the young Dorcas "was enchanted by the frail, melty tendency of the flesh and the Paradise that could make a woman go right back after two days, two! or make a girl travel four hundred miles to a camptown, or fold Neola's arm, the better to hold the pieces of her heart in her hand. Paradise. All for Paradise" (63). Why do the women in Neola's stories seek paradise in a doomed relationship with a man? Morrison's narrator presents two answers, each undermining the other. Neola explains that it is "the power of sin in the company of a weak mind." But to Dorcas, the women in Neola's tales are strong questers who, like many characters in male blood narratives, sacrifice reason and sanity to search for their paradise.[17] Yet, Dorcas's interpretation of paradisal bliss is subverted by her own experience as old Joe Trace's love object. In his reminiscences, he repeatedly courts her by evoking a fragmentary Edenic motif: "I told you again that you were the reason Adam ate the apple and its core. That when he left Eden, he left a rich man. Not only did he have Eve, but he had the taste of the first apple in the world in his mouth for the rest of his life" (133). By ironically connecting Joe's vision of Eden with the characterization of his adulterous passion as Eve's forbidden apple, the narrator subverts her character's interpretation twice. First, she describes Joe's walk toward the party at which he shoots Dorcas as "a long way from [his birthplace] Virginia and even longer from Eden" (180). Second, she includes Felice's account to Joe of Dorcas's last words: "There's only one apple. . . . Just one. Tell Joe" (213). Joe's vision has circulated from his consciousness first to Dorcas, then to Felice, back to himself, and on to Morrison's readers. Yet, even that circle of connections constructed by the narrator is undermined by her when she confesses, "how little I could be counted on; how poorly, how shabbily my know-it-all self covered helplessness" (220). Her ending, "Say make me, remake me" (229), voices the idea that like a jazz composition, her narrative is a work-in-progress that can be continued by ironically undermining paradisal bliss. As in Brontë's and Castedo's narratives, Morrison's fragmentation of the paradise motif into conflicting significations reinforces the image of the narrator who struggles to find her definition of bliss in a world that she does not control and therefore cannot shape into a completed narrative.[18]

While engaging the paradise motif as shaper of fluid, multidirectional narratives, other women writers also use it to explore mystifying alien territories that destabilize the traditional paradisal features. Instead of a linear order leading to either the entrance into or expulsion from paradise, these narratives construct puzzling, open-ended tales that express both continuity and variation in traditional features and significations. On the one hand, they continue such characteristic traits as verdant landscapes, peace, love, and bliss. On the other, they simultaneously incorporate such contrary elements as fierce cold, darkness, and conflict. Furthermore, they reverse gender roles by portraying women as self-assured actants and men as silhouetted stereotypes. They criticize, satirize, or parody the traditional canon. Above all, their paradises are designed to be unreliable, changeable sites that challenge traditional notions of bliss.

In her science fiction tale *Picnic on Paradise*, Joanna Russ, for example, constructs a parody of the adventure-and-quest narrative by depicting a female adventurer in charge of a group of diverse questers. Russ deconstructs the traditional

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relationship between the passive role of the feminized paradise and the active (male) questers by inverting them, then reconstructs the sequence into a narrative centered on exploring inner connectedness. The gender inversion initiates the tale. Alyx, the "Trans-Temporal Agent," is charged with leading a disparate group of tourists on a pilgrimage across a planet named Paradise to "Base B," while shielding them from an ongoing war between two unknown forces. She fulfills her mission by being craftier and more aggressive than either her male opponents or her at times rebellious but mostly frightened clients. The pilgrimage unveils, however, a paradise even more mysterious and terrifying than the war. Its landscape consists of an eclectic range of random elements: "all up and down . . . glaciers and mountains and coral reefs, it's rainbows of inedible fish in continental slopes; it's deserts, cacti, waterfalls going nowhere, rivers that end in lakes of mud and skies—and sunsets—and that's all there is" (85). Moreover, as the group discovers but only Alyx correctly interprets, this mystifying paradise defies the traditional relationship between travelers and traveled space. One challenge focuses on the narrative's title. How is the pilgrimage a "picnic on paradise"?[19] As the group begins its journey, the planet's surface is covered with a lovely powdery snow "as if put down expressly for a pleasure jaunt, a lovely picnic under the beautiful blue heaven of this best of all possible tourist resorts" (95). The group is entranced. But Alyx concludes that paradise is actually daring the naive tourists: "all we meet is our stupidity. It's a picnic. It's a damned picnic" (184). As the narrative's protagonist, paradise behaves erratically. At times, it attacks the group by obstructing its course through blizzards, frigid weather, or unexpected pitfalls. At others, it seems like a menacing tyrant that "must know them intimately, in fact, to find the levers to open them one by one until none of them were left" (180). The pilgrimage reveals itself as a game of Russian roulette in which paradise calls all the shots, ranging from mercy and kindness to deadly attacks. One day, it treats the pilgrims like needy children, lulled "into the sleep and snow of Paradise." It then terrorizes them: "The next day Paradise threw hell at them" (195). Which female role it assumes is unpredictable. The only successful negotiator of this unpredictable antagonist is Alyx, because she alone is at home on the planet and therefore able to prevail against its inexplicable whims. When after two weeks of exhaustive travails and four deaths, the group reaches Base B, Alyx recognizes that the experience has taught them a paradoxical lesson: that quest and paradise are interconnected into a single phenomenon. Paradise is an endless quest filled with unimaginable adventures. And the pilgrimage is as close to paradisal bliss as the "homeless" tourists will come. This insight radically shifts the motif's role in the narrative from being the object of their quest and adventure to inspiring a connectedness to their inner being and to each other.[20]

In *The Passion of New Eve*, Angela Carter intersects narrative, gender, and the paradise motif by deconstructing, ironizing, and parodying all three. The narrator's multiple allusions to other texts in the literature of paradise endow her story with an intra- and intertextual connectedness that builds a rich, dense texture. She first constructs a typical male adventure-and-quest narrative by portraying the young Englishman Evelyn's emigration to New York in search of the beautiful and popular film star Tristessa, whom he idolized as a child. Distracted by an anti-paradisal New York

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that is gripped by a chaotic war carried out by feminist terrorists, he instead pursues, impregnates, and abandons the mysteriously erotic Leilah. To avoid the ugly consequences of his actions, he flees to the Western desert. Ironically, he is captured by Sophia, an agent for the mother of the abandoned Leilah, paradoxically known as both "the Great Emasculator" and "the Great Mother." In a parody of such male-generated narratives as Dante's *Inferno* or the mysterious scene of the Mothers in Goethe's *Faust,* Evelyn is forcibly taken to the Great Mother's underground realm. Its name Beulah mocks both Isaiah's meaning of "happily married" (Isa. 62.4) and Bunyan's description of the pastoral landscape bordering the Celestial City. In Beulah, Evelyn is subjected to a sex change operation accompanied by a series of reorienting lectures. These invert the entire mythology of the patriarchal paradise. Instead of traveling the "phallic projectory [that] takes him onwards and upwards" from the past to the present and future, Evelyn is invited to "journey backwards to the source," to woman's interiority, from which he is to be reborn as the new Eve. Here, Evelyn learns that woman "was her own mythological artifact," "the timeless eternity to the source—interiority" (53, 60). Echoing the protagonists' experiences in many traditional quest narratives, these stories within Carter's story transform Evelyn's attributes from masculine to feminine. Unlike his literary predecessors, however, the change is also physical. Gender, sex, and paradise merge in the narrative of Evelyn's rape by the Great Mother and are subsequently connected to a femininely determined Eden: " 'Where is the garden of Eden?' Sophia demanded. . . . 'The garden in which Adam was born lies between my thighs,' responded Mother" (63). Nourished by Mother's milk, the new Eve leaves her underground realm of Beulah. In the Western desert, she instantly joins womanhood through the brutal tyrant Zero's repeated rapes, and finally, through her sexual encounter with Tristessa, whom Zero unceremoniously unveils as a transvestite. Through these fast-paced "anti-adventures," the new Eve experiences the pain, oppression, and denigration that presumably the Eve figures of traditional quest narratives shaped by the paradise motif undergo. In contrast to the narratological silence accorded their assumed suffering, Carter's narrator centers Eve's story on her quest and eventual release from maltreatment by revisiting in reverse the narrative's nodal points. Both the protagonist and the narrative circle back to their point of departure in England with the message that the traditional silence of Eve can be broken through women's historical and mythological connectedness.

Carter's rapid-fire incorporation of allusions from the Bible and from such canonical authors as Shakespeare, Bunyan, Goethe, or Coleridge demonstrates vividly her exploitation of the paradise motif's capability to connect and disconnect with its previous appearances.[21] After his second rape of Eve, Zero jests, for example: "You Eve . . . Me Adam" (91). His ranch parodies Solomon's Temple; the adjacent ghost town mocks New Jerusalem. As she is forcibly costumed to play the groom at Tristessa's mock wedding, Eve recalls Rosalind's multiple masks in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*: "Under the mask of maleness I wore another mask of femaleness but a mask that now I never would be able to remove, no matter how hard I tried, although I was a boy disguised as a girl and now disguised as a boy again, like Rosalind in Elizabethan Arden. In the desert, we played out an arid pastoral" (132). The last sentence of her parody of Shakespeare's comedy aims its mocking humor

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directly at the paradise motif's function to provide a pleasant site. Driving into California, Eve describes its pleasantly green rolling landscape dotted with groves of citrus trees in terms again reminiscent of Bunyan's description of Beulah outside the City of Zion in *The Pilgrim's Progress*. When she comes upon a California shopping center about to be exploded by guerrillas, Eve satirizes it in words reminiscent of Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" as "one of those all-purpose pleasure domes" (168). Even Nietzsche is present as a silent plaster bust in Zero's study during Zero's second rape of Eve. Parody also functions to endow the paradise motif with a fearsome awe. Evelyn's comparison of his panic upon encountering the Great Mother-Emasculator with Faust's "pure terror" upon entering the Mothers' mystical realm helps identify the underground Beulah as a land fearsomely alien to male questers (60). Eve's concluding statement that she has lived in an "echoing mansion, [a] hall of mirrors" captures Carter's parodic narrative technique (191). Like Tristessa's palace of mirrors, ruined when the testosterone-crazed Zero and his submissive wives attack it, the traditional literature of paradise becomes in Carter's hands a bundle of splintered fragments. She then reassembles them into a narrative that expresses, as Tristessa observes, "the notion of a woman's being, which is negativity. Passivity, the absence of being. To be everything and nothing. To be a pane the sun shines through" (137). Carter's integration of female narratees, motif, and narrative technique incorporates the double function of a mirror: to reflect, but also to comment critically, on the image of woman in patriarchal society. Mimesis and metafiction coalesce (see Brooks 317–18).

In *The Puttermesser Papers*, Cynthia Ozick interweaves the psychological and spiritual development of her protagonist with her construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of three interrelated paradises. Utilizing the diverse features of paradise, she shapes her narrative into a network of interconnections that extend backward from the setting of contemporary New York City to medieval Prague and forward to the mystical realm of the afterlife, in which all desires—from the earthy to the philosophical—will be fulfilled. The resulting story thereby fulfills Brooks's definition of narrative intent: to "lay bare the nature of narration as a form of human desire" (61). First, to enliven her monotonous life and work, the New York lawyer Ruth Puttermesser amuses herself by inventing an Eden composed of "green, green everywhere," a box of fudge, and a stack of library books. She locates this Eden simultaneously in the mundane present and the distant future: "to postulate an afterlife was her single irony—a game in the head not unlike a melting fudge cube held against the upper palate" (13; see also Cohen 90). She playfully examines the connection of this dream with the memory of her great-uncle Zindel and his explanation of the Hebrew tradition of *gan eyden,* the Hebrew word *pardes,* and the Greek *paradeisos.* She next links cabalistic magic with a vision of New York City as a newly created paradise. With the help of a golem that she creates from the earth in her flower pots in imitation of the Great Rabbi Judah Loew of Prague, she runs for mayor of New York on a platform with a single plank: the promise to turn New York, "washed, reformed, restored," into a paradise (64). Just as reading books were an integral part of Puttermesser's personal paradise, so writers take important positions in her idyllic dreams for New York: "How she would like to put Walt Whitman himself in charge of the Bureau of Summary Sessions, and have Shelley take over Water

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Resource Development . . . William Blake in the Fire Department, George Eliot doing Social Services, Emily Brontë over at Police, Jane Austen in Bridges and Tunnels, Virginia Woolf and Edgar Allan Poe overseeing the Office of Single Room Occupancy Housing" (74). But when she wins the election and fulfills her promise to turn New York into a peaceful, joyous pastoral, she encounters the irony that paradise is boring: "Too much Paradise is greed. Eden disintegrates from too much Eden. Eden sinks from a surfeit of itself" (99). New York returns to its former nature, and Puttermesser, ousted from office, forces her oversized golem to dissolve back into soil.

Puttermesser's third construction of paradise just before and right after her murder is as connected to storytelling as the two previous ones were. She returns to cabalistic interpretation, this time to the four consonants composing the Hebrew word for *paradise*. Concentrating on the *s* (*sod* in Hebrew), she interprets its mystery that in Paradise, "oxymorons are as esteemed as orchids" (213). Incorporating this insight, her narratological play becomes purely metafictional. First, she imagines the story of her life as progressing from love to marriage to childbirth and childrearing, and to a life of stimulating philosophical inquiry with Plato and other giants: "She had only to *think,* and the thought would appear incarnate before her" (223). In the process, she discovers that the secret of paradise is its timelessness and its ability to reverse chronology. Next, her story deconstructs itself. Her marriage disintegrates; her child evaporates; and the "green, green, green everywhere" of paradise turns into white ash. The only constant element is her name. As a celebration of her roots, her musical word play on its Yiddish meaning ("butter knife") just before her death is an affirmation of the centrality of the protagonist for the changing roles of the paradise motif in the narrative. Like Brontë and Castedo, Ozick uses the interconnection between her protagonist and the paradise motif to shape her narrative around shifting, fluid notions of bliss, interspersed with a biting satire of contemporary urban life in America.[22]

While Ozick directly relates the triple appearances of the paradise motif in her narrative to the development of her female protagonist, Toni Morrison centers *Paradise* on pitting male and female realizations of the motif against each other in a deadly contest. The novel narrates two paradises separated by only a few miles but by vastly different visions. One is the prosperous, orderly, and rigidly patriarchal town of Ruby, Oklahoma, founded and run by a few exclusive male-dominated families. Proud of their heritage, they are determined to preserve it at any cost. The other is a temporary refuge created by an inclusive, disparate group of women at an abandoned Convent school. The narrated contrasts between the two visions of paradise highlight the differences in outlook between the two genders and their meta-stories (see Peterson 51; Tally 54; Wood 124). Ruby's existence as a haven for the descendants of the early black pioneers depends upon adherence to a patriarchally transmitted order, traditional church and family values, and a shared linear story. That story recounts how their ancestor Zechariah "Big Daddy" Morgan cut off his foot and led his extended family out of Louisiana first to Haven, then to Ruby, ninety miles from the nearest highway, rather than submit to the insults of a group of intoxicated whites. Having inherited both the town and the story of its origin, Big Daddy's descendants define their earthly paradise as keeping both town and story pure and un-

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defiled by outside influences. Challenges by the young, whether in creating their own diversions or questioning the authority of the patriarchs, are viewed as subversive. Women are regarded as silent, supportive partners.

The Convent, by contrast, is a transitional work-in-progress. Built by a liquor dealer with a taste for eroticism, the old stone house with pornographic ornamentation was converted by nuns into a school for Indian girls and later into a haven for a diverse number of women fleeing across the country or from the nearby town from a variety of abusive situations. Together, these refugees gradually create their own paradise of love, peace, and freedom from fear by engaging in the domestic tasks of gardening and cooking, as well as listening to each other's stories and healing their own and each other's pain.

Morrison interweaves these two paradises into a complex plot of moves and countermoves, planned strategies and intuitive responses that combines the suspense and action of the "blood" narrative with the fluid connectedness of the "milk" narrative. The novel opens with male aggression: "They shoot the white girl first. . . . They are nine, twice the number of the women they are obligated to stampede or kill" (3). Why do the nine men attack the five defenseless Convent women? Their answer is that these "Bodacious black Eves unredeemed by Mary" (18), who have dared to build a paradise "permeated with a blessed malelessness, like a protected domain" (177), threaten their own "hard-won heaven" (276). Only by destroying this menace to their definition of bliss is their male-defined idyllic town safe.

In contrast to the calculated moves of the men of Ruby to preserve their rigidly artificial construct of paradise by excising all threats, the women's strategies to create their transient paradise are portrayed as intuitive, experimental, even mystical. Though their tales and needs are disparate—in contrast to Ruby's single canonical story—once they have reached the safety of the old house, they are invited to assist in actively creating an environment that emphasizes independent soul-searching, healing, experimentation with the possibility of failure, and a dynamic community life that ranges from supportive listening to angry disputes. When their leader Connie realizes that isolated soul-searching does not promote communal healing, she invents a ritualistic circular painting. Each woman contributes her pose expressing her freedom from the demons haunting her past. The circle both connects and disconnects their bodies and spirits: "Never put one over the other. Eve is Mary's mother. Mary is the daughter of Eve" (263). Transferring their individual stories of pain to their naked painted images liberates them so that they can embrace peace, unity, and joy in each other's company. Once freed, they are ready for Connie's mystic tale of Piedade, "who sang but never said a word" (264), thereby emancipating herself from the tyranny of judgmental words. Even Connie's murder by the men of Ruby and the women's flight from the Convent cannot destroy the paradise that they have created together and that Piedade's singing mystically embodies. For unlike Ruby, this paradise is not based on a location or a single traditional story, but on the freeing act of creating endlessly new stories of bliss: "Now they will rest before shouldering the endless work they were created to do down here in Paradise" (318).

This final sentence, characterized by Morrison as "flawless" in an interview on *Sixty Minutes* (8 March 1998), locates the interrelation between gender, paradise,

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and storytelling in the "work" of continuous creation.[23] Morrison thereby shifts the motif's traditional function of serving as the goal for a quest, conquest, or creation of a paradise with recognizable canonical features to suggesting a goal that constantly redefines itself. Her narrative structure reinforces its fluidity by challenging readers to piece together the fragmented stories embedded in the sections named for the various Convent-related women. Furthermore, by interweaving the degeneration of the male-determined paradise of Ruby with the tentatively promising future of the fluid paradise created by the Convent women, Morrison's novel demonstrates the capacity of the connective "milk" narrative both to absorb the "blood" narrative with its structural emphasis on conquest and contest and to dissolve it into a fluid, dynamic network of complementary and contrastive components. Both paradises reveal themselves as impermanent and unstable. The rigid and exclusive Ruby cannot adjust to economic, political, and social change. The Convent, built on mutability, on the coming and going of individuals, and on inclusiveness, will survive and perpetuate itself in the many different locations and situations encountered by its former residents and perhaps extend to readers' imagination as well.

An examination of the interplay among gender, the paradise motif, and narrative structure in stories about the loss, search, discovery, or creation of a state of sublime bliss reveals that the motif plays an important role in constructing the telling and hearing of stories as gendered activities. In males' narratives, the motif links the search for bliss simultaneously with riveting stories of adventure, quest, and intrigue and with the portrayal of women as objects of conquest or contest among men. By forging an interconnected network of texts in which authors compete for the approbation of their audiences, the motif provides a means through which the storytellers can, in the words of Nietzsche, "pose and propose themselves" (10:162). Women's narratives tend to use the motif's linking capabilities to challenge the linear structures of conquest and contest tales by dissolving the canonical features of paradise into a network of novel, contradictory, or enigmatic components. Functioning multidirectionally, the paradise motif in women's narratives focuses attention on the process of creating plural paradises. In their different expressions of the connections among multiple paradises, authors of both genders have shaped an ancient dream into a vibrantly contemporary literary motif, poised to shape new narratives.[24] Its continuous challenge to storytellers confirms the musings of Ozick's Puttermesser just before her death: "very deep is the well of Paradise; should we not call it bottomless?" (213).

ENDNOTES

1. Paradise is not to be confused with utopia, which Frye defines as a vision for social ideas and political institutions (109). See also W. H. Auden's distinction between Arcadia or Eden and utopia in "Vespers" (77–78). For further theoretical considerations concerning motif functions, see Daemmrich and Daemmrich 1:1–24, and Wolpers 33–70.

2. Examples range from the Mesopotamian epic *Gilgamesh* and the medieval versions of *Alexander the Great's Journey to Paradise* to modern quest naratives such as Henri Alain-Fournier's *Grand Meaulnes* or Arthur C. Clarke's *Fountains of Paradise*.

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3. On the objectivization of the female body and the "gendered gaze," see among many other studies, Bartky 459; Berger 47; Bordo 6 ff.; Donaldson 374; Dworkin 123–33; Spain 6 ff.; and the essays in Lomperis and Stanbury. In its passivity, the feminized paradise exemplifies Bremond's concept of the "patient," while the male quester is the "agent" (139 ff.)

4. See, for instance, Giovanni Boccaccio's *L'Ameto* or Jorge de Montemayor's *The Diana* for examples of opulently jeweled women as paradisal figures, a reiterated motif in Renaissance pastoral epics and dramas.

5. See Todorov's explanation of this paradox as the narrative's manifestation of two "logics": the narratological and the ritual (70–71). The former reflects the actant's, the latter the observer-explicator's dominant function. For other analyses of the paradoxes in *The Divine Comedy,* see, among many others, Barolini, esp. 94 ff., and Sollers. Dronke and Giamatti (115) point out that already in the earthly paradise on the top of Purgatory, the pilgrim is encouraged to conform to the gentle "innocence" of his surroundings.

6. Texts connecting paradise with hallucination include Mandeville's *Travels*; Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*; Eugène Sue's *Atar-Gull*; Charles Baudelaire's *Artificial Paradises*; and Théodore Gautier's "The Club of the Hashish Takers." See North and Ronell for more recent examples. An equally enigmatic paradisal space is offered by cyberspace in William Gibson's cyberpunk novel *Neuromancer*. Ben-Tov suggests that the technical paradise is a pretext for not having to face ourselves (175).

7. On the relationship between the pastoral genre and the paradise trope or myth, see, among others: Curtius 198; Ettin 28–30; Fernandes-Cañadas de Greenwood 9 ff.; Levin 168–85; Nemoianu 16–17; Poggioli 7–10; and Snell 257–70.

8. For a fuller explanation of Spenser's allegory, see, among many others: Cheney 215 ff.; Hamilton 203–204; Heale 164–66; MacCaffery 384–87; Parker 255; and Tonkin 111–47.

9. Examples of pastoral romances with similar intersections between the paradise motif and narrative structure include those inspired by Torquato Tasso's pastoral drama *Aminta*; Jorge de Montemayor's *The Diana*; Cervantes's *Galatea*; Honoré d'Urfé's *Astrea*; Philippe von Zesen's *Adriatic Rosemund*; and even François-René de Chateaubriand's *Atala*. The titles of other pastoral romances include names of both sexes, as for example, Longus's *Daphnis and Chloe* and Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's *Paul and Virginie*.

10. Examples of the motif of the enchanting and emasculating sorceress extend from the Circe incident in Homer's *Odyssey* (X l. 135 ff.) and the sorceress Simartha's magical incantation in Theocritus's second *Idyll,* to the seductresses in Ludovici Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*, Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberato*, and Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, and Nana's and Cathy's magic in Emile Zola's *Nana* and John Steinbeck's *East of Eden*.

11. Two other male-generated examples of connecting the paradise motif with a reversal of gender roles are John Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Emile Zola's *Abbe Mouret's Transgression*. Perhaps the most extreme link between gender reversal and the paradise motif occurs in Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan und Isold*, when the narrator characterizes the rare woman who renounces the "feminine instinct" of eating the forbidden fruit of knowledge as "a man with courage" (l. 17961).

12. For a discussion of women's deconstruction and reconstruction of the literary canon, see, among others: Cixous; Donaldson 374; Ermarth 11; Greene and Kahn 1 ff.; Homans 4–7; Komar 22; Lanser, "Toward a Feminist Narratology" 343–56; Miller 126; Ostriker 331. See also Brossard 10–13 on the fragmentary, nonlinear features of women's writing, and Warhol's alignment of gender with rhetorical strategies (*Gendered Interventions* 17–19, 29–39).

13. For an analysis of the "unreliability" of Lucy Snowe as narrator, see among others: Ciolkowski 322; Dessner 101–107; Freeman; Jacobus 43; Knies 181–98; Lawrence; O'Dea; Preston; Rabinowitz; and Silver. See also Deleuze and Guattari's development of the rhizome as metaphor for connectedness (9–36). Brontë's narrator challenges—and perhaps broadens—Todorov's concept of the "explicator"

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(61 ff.). For other explications of the link between gender and nonlinear narrative structures, see Mezei's analysis of the shifting roles of free indirect discourse in Austin and Woolf; Friedman's contrast between horizontal and vertical reading (114–18); and Lanser's assertion that women's narratives reflect "ideological tension" between authority and the "fictions" of authority (*Fictions of Authority* 6–8).

14. For insightful analyses of the role of irony in late twentieth-century narrative structures, see among many others, Behler 3–36; Booth 253–77; Handwerk 172–94; Lang 37–69; and Muecke 9–13. For interpretations of the contribution of parody to multivoiced narratives, see Bouillaguet 9–16, Hannoosh; Hutcheon 1–29; and Sangsue 49–69.

15. See Rodríguez-Lee's psycholiterary analysis of Solita's marginality, 217 ff. Cortínez traces it to the European immigrant Solita's status as outsider and foreigner in Chile as well as in El Topaz (76).

16. See Furman 97–102 and Schappell and Lacour for the notion that because the narrator is unreliable, readers must actively assist constructing the novel and its characters.

17. See Daemmrich, *Enigmatic Bliss* 64–69 for an exploration of these antitheses in the literature of paradise by authors of both sexes.

18. Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace* ends similarly, though it recounts a single individual's process of creating a paradise quilt by piecing her life and narrative together from disparate mementos/memories.

19. According to Samuel R. Delany's introduction to *Picnic on Paradise*, Terry Carr, editor of Ace Books (its first publisher), reported that Ace persuaded Russ to change her title from *Picnic in Paradise* to *Picnic on Paradise,* "so people would know that it was science fiction. Otherwise, they might think it was a romance" (xxii).

20. This internal discovery contrasts with the disappointment of the protagonists in Stanislaw Lem's *Eden* in learning that the planet that appears brilliantly colored from the distance is actually barren.

21. See Couillard and Dumouchel 80 on women's penchant to parody men's conceptions of them. Other parodies signaled by critics include Leilah as a parody of the Jeanne Duval cycle in Baudelaire's *The Flowers of Evil* (Britzolakis 51), Tristessa as a caricature of Greta Gabor (Palmer 30), and America as the "Arcadian birthplace of a technological new Eve" (Johnson 167). Lee points out that these eclectic literary games tend to undermine the logic of the narrative (81), while Peach analyzes Carter's inversion of the mythic male succession from father to son to a fluid line of communication between daughter and mother (129).

22. Like Ozick, French Canadian Anne Hébert dissolves the traditional cohesiveness of the motif into multidirectional contradictory strands in her novels *In the Shadow of the Wind*, *The First Garden*, *Burden of Dreams*, and *Suit of Light*.

23. In other interviews, Morrison expressed regret for having capitalized Paradise, because "[t]he whole point is to get paradise off its pedestal, as a place for anyone" (Peterson 204), and that "Canon building is Empire building" (Rigney 106).

24. Perhaps the poet-artist David Daniels's hypertext *The Gates of Paradise*, consisting of 350 hyperlinked "gates," suggests the motif's next frontier. See also Hayles 21 ff. and Landow's question whether the nonlinearity of hypertext is a "feminist sort of writing, the electronic embodiment for which Hélène Cixous called several decades ago" (206).

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